



REFLECTIONS 150 YEARS

John Jeremy AM – Sailing Memoir

John Jeremy: I had my first sail in the famous *Waitangi*, which was then owned by Dr Wearn, on Pittwater in the early 1950s. It was a summer's day with a very fresh northeasterly and I spent my time hanging on grimly – she had no guardrails – and getting soaked. I thought they were all mad.

The experience did nothing to diminish my passion, evident from about the age of seven, for matters maritime and ships in particular. The longing to have a ship of my own developed early, but sailing or boating were not a family pastime, and my early boating experiences were occasional.

Once, for example, I was honoured to be invited to sail with Rear Admiral H.J. Buchanan in his Dragon, *Clar Innes*. His son Robert was a schoolmate. Instructions for attendance were white shirt and shorts and white soft shoes. Moored off the Royal Prince Edward Yacht Club, the boat needed attention before we could sail. The burgee halyard had broken and Muggins, being the smallest on board, was sent up the mast for his first time to retrieve it.

Other boating adventures in the 1950s mainly occurred during May school holidays in Jervis Bay and fishing trips in *Lazy Hour* or trips to Bowen Island in the once mighty ketch *Viking*, owned by Les Yabsley. Regular sailing opportunities grew in the late 1950s, when the father of two school friends, Mac Shannon, acquired the 1928 built sloop *Faerie*, which he kept moored in Vacluse Bay. *Faerie* provided many adventures on the Harbour and at sea on passage to and from Pittwater. *Faerie* is now listed on the Australian Register of Historic vessels.

I credit one of these trips with teaching me how to pour a gin and tonic for Mac off Long Reef while beating very slowly to windward in a 25 knot Northeaster. In 1960 Mac sold *Faerie* and bought an Alan Payne designed 38 foot Ampopetta class sloop. Built of plywood and rather under rigged, the poor man's Tasman Seabird took a gale to get moving, but was enormously commodious design which felt much bigger than she really was.

Chione (A90) was initially moored in Vacluse Bay, but Mac later moved her to the Point Piper Marina under the watchful eye of Hal Venables. *Chione* was very different to *Faerie* and provided many adventures, including winning the Lion Island Race, I think it was in 1968, in a southerly gale when we were the only boat to finish. Everyone else had retired to Pittwater to ride out the wind and return the following day.

Chione could be a little slow to react under the helm and I remember one race when on port tack we were called by a small starboard tack yacht called *Sparkle*. We failed to come about in time and our bow rose over the cockpit of *Sparkle* with some grinding sound effects.

Situation wasn't helped by one of our crew, Dusty Miller, calling, "Are you racing?" *Sparkle's* skipper responded angrily, "Of course I'm racing! What do you think I'm doing?" I once related this story to Bill Gale many years later who replied, "Yes I remember it well; I was the skipper of *Sparkle*."

My desire for my own boat, it didn't have to sail, show no signs of abating and by 1960 I was still pestering my father to come to the party and help.

Success, I have been told, followed some advice from my father's old friend Ron Hoy who said on one occasion, "For God's sake Richmond, buy the boy a boat!".

After some exploration an order was placed for a 16 foot half cabin motor launch which was delivered in 1961. I moored *Tarrina* in Vaucluse Bay for 11 years and she provided the means of exploring the harbour, photographing ships and the occasional weekend away exploring the upper reaches of Middle Harbour.

The 5/7 horsepower Blaxland-Chapman twin stroke motor gave me experience in restarting a stalled and hot two-stroke engine whilst rapidly drifting onto a lee shore. I had my little ship, but others could provide me with some experience. After a few years I moved her to a mooring under Hal Venables at Point Piper.

Later in the 1960s times for Mac Shannon got a bit tough and he sold *Chione* and bought a Thunderbird which he christened *Chionetta* and kept for a couple of years. Having sailed with Mac in the SASC races throughout the 1960s I was then without a regular sail, although I did get out occasionally in Hal Venables' *Stella Felix* and Tim Furber's *Stella Claire*. I also sailed for a while with Vivian Shaw and his dark blue Pittwater 30 *Carrie*.

Without Mac Shannon's yachts to sail in I decided it was time to get one of my own. Finally, in 1972 I decided that I could afford to buy a 1967 built Hood 20 which I purchased in Middle Harbour for the grand sum of three and a half thousand dollars. When I returned with *Tiarri* (A116) as I named her, to the marina in Rose Bay my pleasure was somewhat deflated by Hal Venables taking one look at my new pride and joy and declaring "What did you buy that thing for?"

I sold *Tarrina* finally for \$800 to a new owner who wanted a marina berth holder. I often wonder what became of that little boat which had served so well for 11 years.

In 1971 Mac said to me one day, "John, you should be a member of the Amateurs. I'm going to propose you." "Yes Mac, of course." I survived an interview with Stephen Lloyd, the Commodore, and so began nearly half a century of pleasure as a member of one of Sydney's greatest sailing clubs.

I'm eternally grateful to Mac Shannon for proposing me as a member. The SASC has become a treasured part of my life ever since. *Tiarri* was put on the SASC yacht register with sail number A116. Her crew comprised me, Mac, my nephews Mathew and Robert Jeremy, who would sail with me regularly for 10 years, from the age of 14 to 24, and Dennis Butler, a young man from the planning office of Cockatoo Island.

Despite Hal Venables disdain, which was somewhat understandable, we had a great time in *Tiarri* for five years sailing in Division 6, I think it was, and winning a gold medal in one year.

By 1977 I felt I could afford something better and sold *Tiarri* for four thousand dollars, a profit, and bought Jim Dibble's Cavalier 26 *Cavatina* which I renamed *Tantani* with sail number A59. We sailed her for four years in the Quarter Ton division discovering her foibles, not very stable downwind under spinnaker and even breaking her mast in a fresh southerly off Nielsen Park on one occasion.

She never really hit the right spot although she was a big improvement over *Tiarri*. I moved her to a Sydney Amateurs mooring in Mosman Bay in 1978. Meanwhile, life at the SASC moved on and in 1978 I was persuaded by the incoming commodore Colin Crisp to come onto the board as a Director.

The record shows that one Charles Maclurcan also became a Director in that year. I'd already become involved with the project to acquire a new starter's boat, drawing up the specification and helping with the conversion of LFB 445 into our stalwart *Captain Amora*.

The following year in 1979 I became Vice Commodore under Vic Dibben as Commodore. I succeeded Vic as Commodore in 1982. By that time my career had advanced and in 1981 I became Managing Director of Cockatoo Dockyard, which prompted me to refer to the SASC boatshed occasionally as my other dockyard.

In a position by 1981 to contemplate another boat, I decided that I could improve on *Tantani*. I'd taken a liking to the East Coast 31. It looked like a real yacht, was the right size, had good reputation, excellent deck area. Once you've owned a hood 20 or 23 you become used to a deck and you could still stand upright down below.

One day I saw an advertisement for one at the CYC for which the price had been dropped from \$43,000 to \$40,000. I thought I should have a look and met *Miko* for the first time. Built in 1977 she was owned by a Qantas pilot, Don Burfitt.

Apart from being painted dark green, she had been built and equipped for category one offshore racing and had everything. I succumbed and within two days I'd become a fleet owner. *Miko* became *Tingari* (2131) and Ian Hobbs of the Mosman Bay Marina started a 40 year plus relationship with her, painting her white in November 1981 and maintaining her annually ever since.

The purchase of *Tingari* proved to be one of the best buys I've ever made. At first Mac Shannon, (nephews) Robert and Mathew continued as crew until Mac retired from sailing and the boys, men by then, moved on with their lives. However another SASC member, Maurie Brell, had joined the crew.

Maurie was, well, a character and provided some legendary memories during his time on board, including breaking his arm during a wild Chinese gybe on one occasion and insisting that we finish the race. We didn't of course; took him to hospital instead. He also excelled himself one Easter Bob Brown race by bringing his freshly washed washing with him to sort out and darning his socks in the boat anchored in Smith's Creek.

Maurie worked at AWA and recruited some young engineers and technicians to join the crew in *Tingari*. Some of them are still in the crew nearly a third of a century later, joined by other friends and contacts over the years. *Tingari* has given many people a lot of fun on the Harbour and at sea, but of course that's another story faithfully recorded in her log.

Meanwhile, I remained on the Board of the Sydney Amateur Sailing Club, serving under 13 Commodores, (and) I hope giving something back to a club which has become such an indispensable part of my life for what is now half a century.

I have however retired from the Board, thinking that 42 years was more than long enough for anyone.